



Atwood House at 17th and G



Downtown Neighborhood Focus Area Action Plan



State Capitol Building looking west on J Street from within the focus area

Acknowledgements

The Downtown Neighborhood Association, the committee for the development of the Focus Area Plan, residents in the Focus Area who provided their input, and the City of Lincoln Focus Area Concept Team [or FACTeam].

December, 1998

Introduction

Since 1993, the City of Lincoln, through its Urban Development Department, has been concentrating neighborhood revitalization activities in multi-block areas called target areas. This approach—to focus the City's limited community development resources in relatively small areas (12 to 30 blocks)—was used to achieve demonstrable improvements in the short term by encouraging private investment, increasing confidence in the area, and creating a spillover effect for reinvestment.

Four target areas, parts of the Everett, Near South, South Salt Creek, and Woods Park neighborhoods, were established in 1993. The revitalization process began with the formation of a Target Area Working Committee from each neighborhood. These committees worked with Urban Development staff to identify problems and develop goals and strategies to address these problems. This work was presented in an Action Plan for each area, which was a "blueprint" for revitalization for the next three to five years, and the neighborhood working committees maintained a major role in implementing the Action Plans.

In the fall of 1996, with the accomplishment of goals contained in the Action Plans, activities in these target areas began to wind down, and the City began the process of selecting new neighborhood revitalization areas. Additional criteria were developed for the selection of new areas—criteria that included deteriorated housing and environmental (litter, junk, etc.) problems, impact on community perceptions because of high calls for service (complaints) to the Lincoln Police Department, the Codes Division of the Building and Safety Department, the Health Department, and the Neighborhood Quality of Life Hotline. These criteria led to a focus upon the residential areas surrounding Lincoln's downtown business core (parts of the Downtown, Everett, Near South, Woods Park, South Salt Creek, and Malone neighborhoods).



The Angelo and Bel-Air apartment buildings at 531 & 541 S. 18th Street, built in 1915



2147 K Street



1802 G Street



These new areas are substantially different from the former target areas in several respects. Housing and neighborhood deterioration is more severe, the residential density is greater, and there is a high degree of investor-ownership, even of single-family housing. The greater need in this area required a more comprehensive approach to revitalization, and resulted in the creation of the Focus Area Concept.

In addition to working with neighborhoods, the Focus Area Concept calls for, working with a committee called the Focus Area Concept Team or FACTeam. FACTeam members represent various city departments, including Public Works, Building & Safety, Planning, Parks and Recreation, Health, Police, and Urban Development. The FACTeam works to identify problems, concerns, and issues in these areas, and to develop programs and strategies to address them. This way, city departments necessary for and involved (sometimes unknowingly) in neighborhood revitalization are included at the beginning of the planning process.

Downtown's History

The Downtown Neighborhood encompasses an area from 7th to 24th Streets, G to R Streets. As the original plat of the City of Lincoln, it has seen more changes than any other area of the city. It evolved from prairie to log houses, to frame shops and brick stores, to steel and concrete commercial towers. The life cycles of the towers have included conversion of department stores and hotels into offices and apartments, and conversion of apartments back to offices. The city's first "skyscrapers" still stand, albeit known by different names: First National Bank Building (now the Lincoln Building), Security Mutual Life Insurance Company (now Centerstone) and the Stuart Building (now University Towers). The Terminal Building and Gold's still retain their original identities. All of these buildings were known as the city's tallest until construction of the third State Capitol in 1922-32.

The original town site of Lancaster was settled in the 1850s. In 1867, Lancaster was replaced by Lincoln, the state's new capital city. The U.S. Courthouse and Post Office (now Old City Hall) supplanted Market Square in the 1870s and as the city grew from 13,000 in 1880 to 55,000 in 1890, the epicenter moved eastward. At this time, the boundaries of Market Square were 9th and 10th Streets and O and P Streets. By the turn of the century, the city's commercial center was at 13th and O Streets.

Residences have always been an important part of Downtown's fabric. Luke Lavender's log cabin at 14th and O Streets was as integral as the finest mansions built between J and K Streets from the Capitol to the County Courthouse. Another prime location for mansions was along 14th Street between Q and R Streets.

The growth of the University of Nebraska campus, the expansion of downtown commercial businesses and subsequent parking lots have taken their toll on downtown housing opportunities. However, the Metropolitan, President and Ambassador — apartment buildings built in the 1910s and 1920s — along with converted offices, commercial businesses, hotels, and Haymarket area warehouses maintain the tradition of downtown living.

The Downtown Neighborhood Focus Area contains some more traditional residential areas which have also seen their share of changes. There is a densely populated residential area between the Capitol to Lincoln High School, along both sides of J Street. Like the core of Downtown, this area originally contained a wide range of housing types. Near the Capitol there were mansions and along K and L Streets, east of 19th Street, there were workers' cottages. Most of the mansions are gone, but many of the cottages built in the 1910s remain standing between present day apartment buildings.

There is considerable architectural character in the older apartment buildings along 18th Street, from J Street north. Even the smaller houses tell tales of Lincoln's growth. Charles J. Olson, a "stone cutter," lived in a small frame house at 1835 J Street before establishing the construction company that built much of downtown Lincoln.

Small worker's houses along K and L Streets reflect both the edge of the city in the early 20th Century and the cluster of industrial uses attracted by Antelope Creek and the Rock Island Railroad. The construction of Lincoln High School in 1913-15 and the residential growth further east and south changed this area forever from "edge of the city" to "edge of the center."

Focus Area Description

The Downtown Neighborhood Focus Area is located in the southeastern part of the neighborhood. It is bounded by 17th and 24th Streets on the west and east, and M and G Streets on the north and south. The focus area is an integral part of the Downtown Neighborhood which the neighborhood association feels is a large and diverse part of our city, unique in its size as well as its strengths and challenges.

Unlike the rest of the Downtown Neighborhood, the focus area is more traditional in its land uses. Where the core contains various financial institutions and commercial offices and the Haymarket district includes speciality shops, art galleries, and restaurants, the focus area contains single family dwellings and early 1900's workers' cottages alongside old and new apartment buildings. The mix of owner-occupied homes and a tee landlords contribute to both the strengths and weaknesses of the focus area. Strategies listed later in this report outline activities the neighborhood reconmends to address the issues in an effort to stabilize the area.

Zoning & Land Use

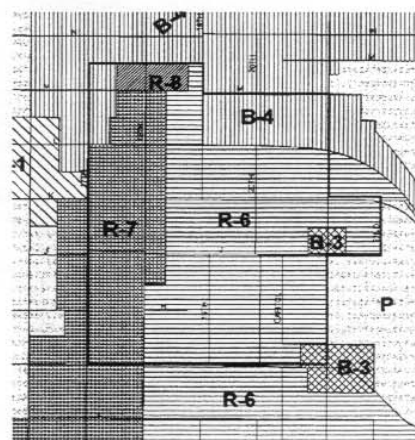
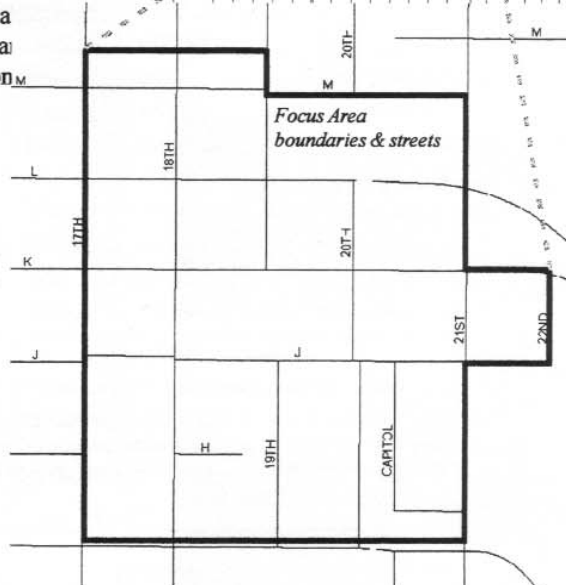
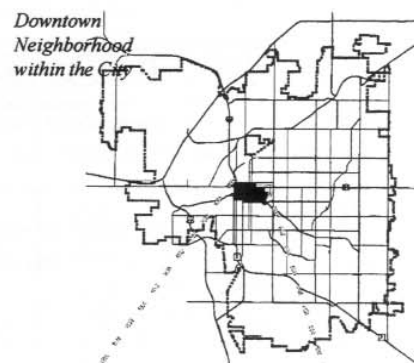
The focus area is predominantly zoned for high density residential use: R-6, R-7 and R-8. There are three small business zoned areas in the focus area which include business, automotive and small manufacturing uses, as well as dry cleaning establishments, gas station, auto service businesses, small offices, etc. These comprise less than 10% of the focus area.

By far, the majority of the focus area is zoned R-6 and R-7, with only 2 blocks at its northern edge zoned R-8. As in other core neighborhoods, these zoning districts reflect the area's position near major activity centers: the State Capitol, the central business district, large employers, and educational institutions. Also as reflected in other core (older) neighborhoods, these high density residential uses generate serious impacts on the area's older infrastructure, particularly the streets, with parking at a premium.

The older apartment buildings are representative of the original character of the area, as they were constructed to serve those who have business at the State Capitol and in the downtown business center. These, along with the large, newer apartment buildings housing university students and downtown workers, continue the area's primary function of providing housing near the City's business and political center. Many of these buildings were constructed within the last twenty years on blocks that once were predominantly single family homes.

Conditions of Structures

Although many of the original structures have been replaced by apartment buildings, the focus area still contains significant structures that are on or have been identified as eligible for the National Register. The area is bordered on the west by the State Capitol, one of the architectural wonders of the world, and on the east by Lincoln High School, the first high school in the city. The Atwood House, located inside the focus area on 17th Street, is also on the National Register (see photo on first page). Apartment buildings considered



Focus Area zoning

Condition of Structures by Ownership in Downtown Focus Area

| Rating | Owner-Occupied | | Investor-Owner | | Total | |
|--------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Excellent | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 1.5 | 2 | 1.2 |
| Good | 13 | 30.9 | 70 | 53.4 | 83 | 48.0 |
| Fair to Good | 22 | 52.4 | 37 | 28.3 | 59 | 34.1 |
| Fair to Poor | 7 | 16.7 | 19 | 14.5 | 26 | 15.0 |
| Poor | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 2.3 | 3 | 1.7 |
| Dilapidated | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 42 | 100.0 | 131 | 100.0 | 173 | 100.0 |

Based on 1997-98 Housing Condition Survey and
County Assessor Ownership / Address data.

Downtown At-A-Glance

| | City | Downtown Neighborhood | Focus Area |
|---------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Population | 191,972 | 2,940 | 1,447 |
| % Minority | 5.2% | 8.0% | 11.7% |
| % Hispanic | 1.2% | 3.9% | 1.5% |
| Housing Units (HU) | 75,402 | 2,353 | 1,520 |
| % Owner-Occupied | 58.4% | 4.4% | 24.3%* |
| Median Household Income | \$28,186 | \$10,643 | \$12,016* |
| Median Home Value | \$61,600 | \$27,900 | \$41,000* |
| Median Gross Rent | \$379 | \$301 | 296* |
| % Units Built Before 1940 | 20.2% | 44.5% | 40.0%* |

Source: 1990 Census

* 1997 County Assessor Ownership / Address data.

* Data for Census Tract 17, Block Group 4. This Census area most closely matches the Focus Area boundaries: about 66% of the Focus Area is included in Block Group 4, while about 40% of Block Group 4 is not included in the Focus Area.

Downtown Focus Area Population Race and Origin

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| White | 1,278 |
| Hispanic | 22 |
| Black | 70 |
| American Indian | 10 |
| Asian / Pacific Islander | 77 |
| Other | 12 |

Source: 1990 Census



eligible for nomination include the Algonquin, Colonial, and Fontanelle apartments and, pictured in this report, the Angelo and Bel-Air Apartments. All were built in the early 1900s. While their numbers have dwindled, some of the workers' cottages that made up the early single family residential uses still stand along K and L Streets.

A recent residential structural survey conducted for this plan indicated that 144, or 84%, of the structures in the focus area are in "Good" or "Fair to Good" condition, with just over 1% in "Excellent" condition; while 29, or almost 17%, are in "Fair to Poor" and "Poor" condition. These evaluations were based on an exterior survey of specific structural components.

Overall, these numbers reflect the impact of new apartment building construction and demolition of older housing that was showing decay and deterioration. Although the numbers appear to downplay the need for rehabilitation, the remaining housing must be improved to ensure the continued availability of affordable housing in the area.

Demographics

The 1980 and 1990 Census data indicate the number of dwelling units in the focus area did not significantly increase in that period. In 1980 there were 1478 units, in 1990 there were 1520. This would indicate that the larger apartment buildings had already been constructed and that those built after 1980 replaced older structures or were conversions from single family to multiple unit uses.

The Focus Area is located primarily in Census Tract 17, Block Group 4, and contains over 78 acres. According to the 1990 Census, the population in the focus area by age group shows that the group between 21-59 years is by far the largest - 960. This can be compared to either end of the age spectrum (under 5 to 20 years - 286, and over the age of 60 - 201). There are 703 non-family households vs. 195 households with married couples with or without children. This also indicates that the Downtown Focus Area is home primarily to students and working-age people who find the area well situated for a wide diversity of occupational opportunities, as well as for its proximity to the University of Nebraska.

The 1990 Census provides statistics on additional aspects of the Focus Area. The cultural diversity is shown in the table at left. The median household income in the Focus Area is \$13,493, while city-wide it is \$28,186. This gap, and the fact that only one-fourth of the structures in the area are owner-occupied, may reflect the large student population in the Focus Area.

Antelope Valley Study

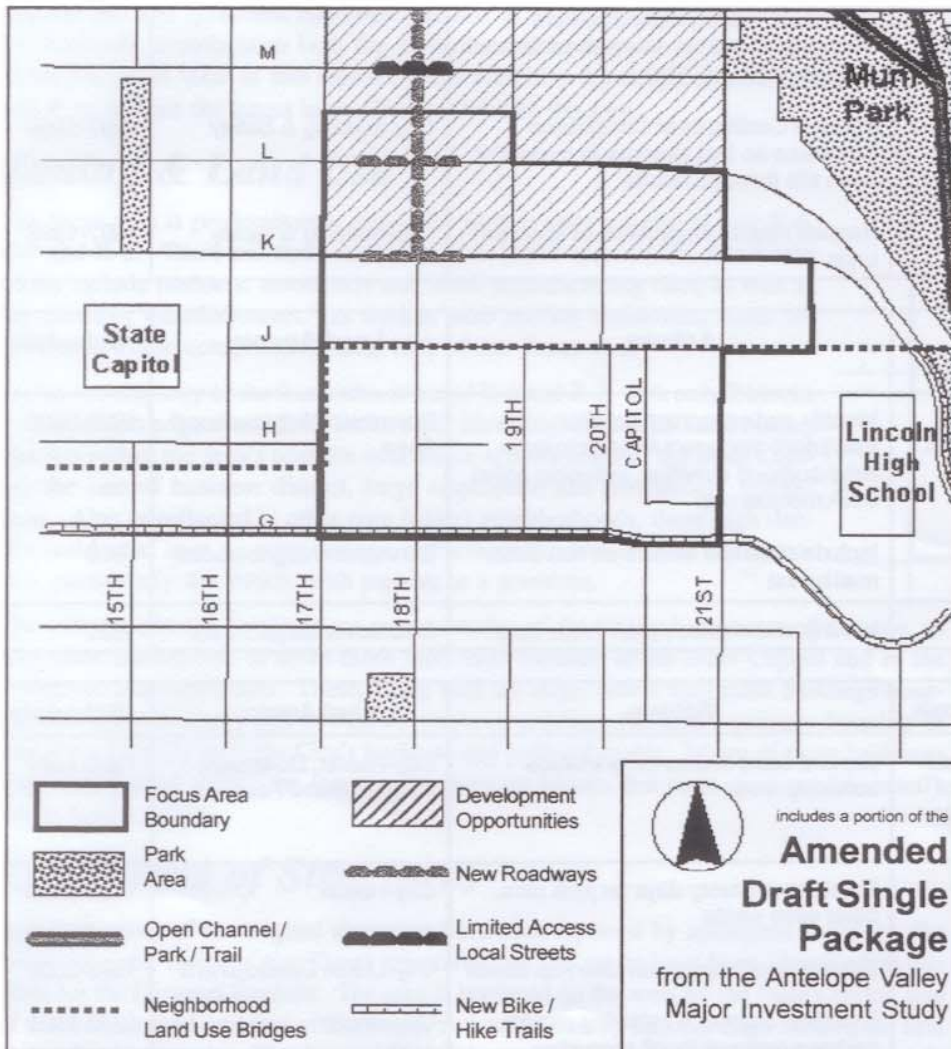
The Antelope Valley Major Investment Study addresses storm water management, transportation and community revitalization in the core of the city over the next fifteen to twenty years. The latest draft proposes a new roadway that bisects the focus area at 19th Street, from K Street northward. This 6-lane roadway, if approved at this location, will have significant impacts, including revitalization activities in an area two blocks east and west of the roadway. The study is in its third year and no improvements affecting the focus area have been finalized.

Focus Area Strengths

- ◆ Affordable housing available; mix of economic levels of residents
- ◆ Convenient to downtown business district with entertainment, public facilities (library, government buildings); financial center; University of Nebraska campus; public transportation, and many large employers
- ◆ Historic significance of the area
- ◆ Public and private reinvestment already occurring in the neighborhood
- ◆ Antelope Valley Major Investment Study - potential for new mixed uses, green space, housing
- ◆ A neighborhood association striving to maintain and improve the quality of life in the neighborhood and community

Focus Area Challenges

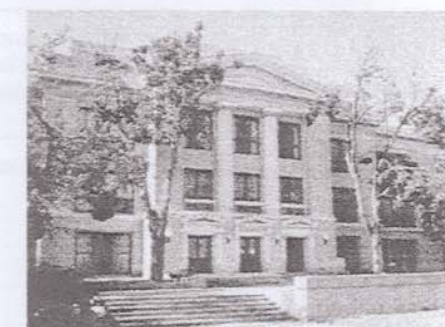
- ◆ Environmental blight related to housing, i.e., discarded furniture in yards and on porches, lack of maintenance and upkeep
- ◆ Mismatch of density of residents and available parking for those residents and visitors
- ◆ Needed public improvements include better lit and better maintained alleys, and replacement of deteriorated sidewalks
- ◆ Large number of absentee owners resulting in lack of attention to properties
- ◆ No equity and development incentives on a par with development at edge of city
- ◆ Neighborhood association needs to increase in numbers and diversity representative of its residents



602 - 606 S. 19th Street



1948 - 1950 J Street



Lincoln High School, north doors



includes a portion of the

Amended Draft Single Package

from the Antelope Valley
Major Investment Study

Not shown: City Focus Area investments, relocated UN-L service bldgs, student recreation fields, surface parking (sites TBD).
Note: All package elements are subject to further design development and compliance with federal and state regulations.

Downtown Focus

| Residential Goals | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|--|--|--|------------|
| Rehabilitate the existing housing stock | Identify funding resources & programs, provide that information to owners & tenants | City-Urban Development | 1997-2000 |
| Promote Pride Program (Front Door Campaign) | Provide funding for exterior improvements | Neighborhoods, Inc, Downtown Neigh. Assn, using CDBG | 1998-2000 |
| Increase the number of owner occupied dwellings | Develop a marketing/promotional package including video to encourage home buyers to purchase in the area | City-Urban Development, using CDBG | 1998 |
| Ensure that the City's Minimum Housing Code is met | Evaluate existing housing stock to determine substandard conditions Make appropriate referrals | City-Urban Development | 1998 |
| | Provide housing code inspection services to those property owners whose dwellings do not meet minimum housing code | City-Building & Safety | 1998 -2000 |
| | Improve Certificate of Compliance procedure so that changes in ownership don't slip through 'cracks' | City-Building & Safety | 1997-1998 |
| | Require interior inspections of licensed units | City-Building & Safety | 1997-1998 |

| Stabilize Neighborhood | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|---|--|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Work with on-site managers of multiples | Identify and encourage on-site apartment managers to participate in neighborhood activities, including active DNA membership | Downtown Neighborhood Assn. | 1998-2000 |
| | Include absentee owners on newsletter mailing list | Downtown Neighborhood Assn. | 1998 |
| Census | Identify who makes up the focus area | Downtown Neigh. Assn. | 1999 |

| Environmental Goals | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|--|--|--|-----------|
| Clear alleys and other public right of way of overgrown vegetation, etc. | Expand weed ordinance to include volunteer trees | City-Health, Downtown Neighborhood Assn. | 1998-1999 |
| Abate solid waste problems | Establish amnesty days for junk cars, other solid waste | City-Health | 1998-2000 |
| | Establish summer youth clean-up teams | City-Urban Development | 1998-2000 |
| | Establish ordinance requiring regular garbage removal for all properties | City-Health | 1998-1999 |

Area Strategies

| Land Use Goals | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Decrease the density of the area | Develop incentives for the de-conversion of single family dwellings | City-Urban Development | 1998-2000 |
| | Investigate zoning solutions to reduce or freeze density | Downtown Neighborhood Assn. | 1998-2000 |

| Recreational Facilities & Green Space Goals | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|---|---|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Encourage tree planting and property-enhancing landscaping | Apply for landscaping funding through the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's Green Space Stewardship Initiative | Downtown Neighborhood Assn. | 1998-2000 |
| | Encourage low-maintenance yards | Downtown Neigh. Assn. | 1998-2000 |
| Increase recreational facilities in neighborhood | Work with churches and schools to provide outdoor and indoor play space | City-Parks, Private | 1998-2000 |
| Remove dead trees or trim dead limbs from trees on private property | Provide financial assistance for tree management/maintenance | City-Urban Development | 1997-2000 |

| Infrastructure Goals | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|--|---|--|-----------|
| Improve deteriorated street surfaces | Repair broken curb cuts, ramps, and gutters | City-Public Works & Utilities | 1998-2000 |
| Improve deteriorated sidewalks | Replace sidewalks, as indicated in Downtown Neighborhood Association & Public Works surveys | City-Public Works & Utilities | 1998-1999 |
| Improve storm drainage in focus area and replace old water mains | Monitor effects of storm sewer improvements and identify water mains needing replacement | City-Public Works & Utilities, <i>using bond issue funds</i> | 1999-2000 |

| Crime & Security Goals | Actions | Lead Agency | Schedule |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| Improve the security of residents and properties | Assess lighting needs and make appropriate recommendations/requests for additional street lighting | Downtown Neighborhood Assn., FACTeam | 1998-1999 |
| | Assess effectiveness of ordinance requiring non-intrusive lighting in parking lots | FACTeam | 1998-1999 |
| | Explore feasibility of installing pedestrian lighting on private property | City-Urban Development | 1998-1999 |

Downtown Focus Area

Strategies

Neighborhood involvement in Antelope Valley process & activities

Rehabilitate existing housing stock

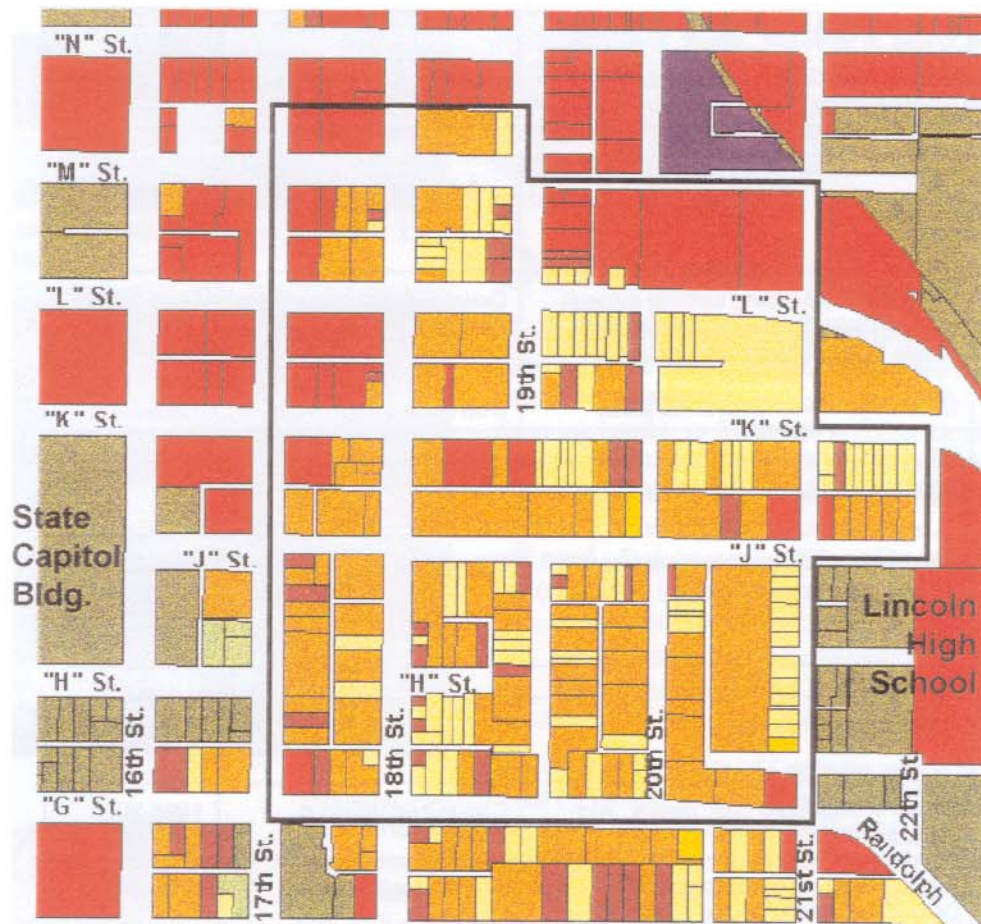
Develop front door painting campaign

Abate solid waste problems (removal of junk cars, garbage removal service for all properties)

Encourage on-site apartment managers to participate in neighborhood activities

Improve deteriorated streets & sidewalks

Improve security for residents -- add lighting & remove or thin overgrown vegetation



0 200 400 Feet